

Fine Gael shifts to backing public childcare model as Harris dampens November election speculation ^[1]

Taoiseach signals move away from reliance on private sector care while insisting Coalition Government will last full term

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Excerpt

Fine Gael has announced a major policy shift on childcare, saying it wants a move away from the private sector to an affordable “public early learning and childcare model”.

In his opening address at a two-day party meeting in Tullamore, Taoiseach and Fine Gael leader Simon Harris signalled that he wanted the State’s childcare system to be financed from the public purse.

“I want us to develop a childcare system that works for every parent.

“I don’t believe this vision will ever be achieved if we simply leave it to the market, frankly the stakes are far too high, and parents want certainty.

“So now I want Fine Gael to make that shift and do what is in the best interests of children and their families, by moving to an affordable, high quality, public early learning and childcare model,” he said.

Mr Harris said he was proud of what the Government had achieved in reducing childcare costs since 2020.

“The evidence is clear: Investing heavily in high quality early childcare and early childhood education reaps great rewards in later life.

“It also reduces educational inequalities, particularly for those who may be experiencing disadvantage, and it enables women to fulfil their ambitions.”

He said that he wanted Fine Gael to be more ambitious in achieving this goal. He said parents of young children spoke to him about cost but also about the difficulty in accessing places. He also suggested that childcare facilities could be developed as part of each new school building.

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